

Concepting

It is a fundamental law of the universe that energy follows thought. You will attract to yourself the predominant focus of your thoughts. Regardless of where you practice, there is no shortage of people in your community who need chiropractic care. You should mentally visualize these patients being attracted to you. Successful doctors will write a sentence or two that details what he or she wants to happen. Then when you are performing your daily physical exercise routine, you can mentally repeat this phrase, such as:

"I am a superior doctor busy helping more and more people."

Many doctors never take the time to set goals, or if they do they don't mentally focus on their goals. However, if we could eavesdrop on their thoughts, we might hear them saying:

*"I don't have enough time to see more patients." or
"I am not making enough money to get out of debt."*

If these are your **predominant** thoughts, this is the result you will attract to yourself.

Assume Responsibility for Your Life

This principle is essential in the lives of your patients, as well as your own life. We have all encountered people who are depressed and find reasons to blame others for their problems. When you try to suggest ways they can change their circumstances, they find ever more reasons why they cannot change.

Your environment and life circumstances are a reflection of your inner self. Perhaps this is part of what B.J. Palmer was referring to when he said, *"Above Down, Inside Out."* If you are unhappy with your circumstances, change yourself and your environment will begin to manifest that change. Successful people view obstacles as challenges to overcome.

We are here to help others and to expand our knowledge, awareness, and spirituality. You have the best profession in the world to help others. Look back on your life, or perhaps the lives of friends or family members who have overcome adversity. There are times when things go very smoothly with no bumps in the road. Then at other times there are many obstacles to overcome. During which of these times do you experience the most personal growth?

Perhaps you know individuals who have had everything given to them, and they have not had to work for what they have. How strong do you think this individual will be when they must face adversity? We are strengthened by the obstacles we overcome. The next time you face an obstacle say to yourself, *"Thank you God for giving me this new opportunity to learn and grow."*

As Albert Einstein said, *"God does not play dice with the Universe."* There is wisdom to creation and your personal obstacles are given to you for a reason. You have the free will to either face and overcome your obstacles, or to retreat from them.

Set Goals

While some doctors may succeed in business without planning, this is the exception rather than the rule. A ship at sea without navigational aids can become lost and never reach port. Goals are your aid to navigation. They supply you with a target to focus on about where you want your personal and professional life to go.

While you must always work hard toward achieving your goals, do so without an emotional attachment to the outcome. Once you have done your best, you must *'Let go and let God.'* Obstacles will always arise in your path. Just step to the side and create a new path around the obstacle toward your goal.

Clinic Mission Statement

The process of setting goals begins with creating a mission statement for your clinic. It should be short, clear, and concise. It should convey in one or two sentences why your clinic exists, and why a patient should choose your service. Two examples are:

- *"Our mission is to educate our patients on the principles of healthy living, so they can enjoy the greatest possible measure of health and happiness in their life. This will include many diverse areas such as proper choice of food, regular exercise, avoidance of toxins, stress reduction, a positive mental attitude, and intact nerve function through regular chiropractic care."*
- *"This clinic exists to identify and correct vertebral subluxation in as many members of our community as possible. We educate our patients to the dangers of impaired neurological function and the potential for maximum health."*

You should write your clinic's mission statement. Once it is written, ask your staff if they understand it, support it, and can act on it. If you find that your actions are contrary to your mission statement, you should either revise your mission statement so that it more closely describes the purpose of your clinic, or get back on purpose.

Focus

Successful leaders are able to compartmentalize the many items they must deal with during the day. Each of us will have personal problems in our life. However, if you let those problems intrude on your thoughts during your workday, this will adversely affect your business. Stated another way, you must have **present time consciousness**. It is a hallmark of successful doctors that they make the patient feel like the most important person in the world. For the brief time you are with them, they are the most important person in your world.

While these two areas are not truly separate, it is also helpful to mentally keep the business side of your practice separate from the patient care side of practice. When you are with a patient, your only concern should be his or her well being, not how your treatment recommendations will affect your cash flow.

Clinical Pearl: Before you enter the treatment room, pause briefly to center yourself. In the words of the Jedi master Yoda, *"Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter. You must feel the Force around you."* Do not forget that before D.D. Palmer discovered Chiropractic, he was a magnetic healer.

Lay Lectures

A lay lecture is probably the single most effective practice promotion tool you have available. You will need a room large enough to accommodate 20 or more people. When you are first starting out, it is unlikely that your clinic will have a room that large. If you are in an office building, it is possible that the building has a meeting room available to all tenants. Public libraries often have meeting rooms you can use for free. If none of the above are available, you will probably have to rent a meeting room in a motel near your clinic.

Unless you have prior public speaking experience, you will likely be quite nervous at first. Here are some suggestions to ease the transition:

- Script out on paper what you want to say. This can be as general as just a list of topics, or as specific as each individual sentence you intend to say. Plan on speaking for 30-45 minutes, with 15-20 minutes for questions.
- Rehearse your talk, either in private, or in front of a friend or family member.
- Use visual aids such as Powerpoint or 35 mm slides. This is how many beginners get their start—by merely providing narration to slides.

Instead of giving the same talk again and again, you should consider speaking on a new topic each time. In the process of researching new talks, you will expand your areas of expertise. The topics are as varied as the individual chiropractor. The essential element is that the lay lecture gives you the opportunity to:

- Educate your patient (or prospective patient) on some aspect of health
- Establish in the listener's mind that you are competent to be 'their' doctor

You should also consider purchasing a video camera and recording your presentation. The equipment and software to edit your tape are now inexpensive and easy to use. You can create a library of health education tapes for use in your office. When a patient has a question you can now say, *"You need to see my tape on ..."* This is a win-win situation:

- It is more effective use of your time to have the patient view your taped presentation
- The patient saves money and becomes more educated about their condition
- You provide the patient with convincing evidence that you have what it takes to be 'their' doctor.

Newsletters

A fundamental principle of advertising is that you should keep your name in front of the customer. A monthly or quarterly educational newsletter is a very efficient tool to accomplish this goal. While you can purchase a generic newsletter written by someone else, it is more effective if you write your own newsletter.

Your newsletter will be your primary means to communicate to your patients about upcoming events, such as your lay lectures. Successful professionals find ways to work more efficiently. One way they do this is by creating multiple uses for the same work product. You can use the research and effort that went in to scripting your lay lecture to write an educational article for your newsletter. Or perhaps you have written a professional journal article from which you can extract a scaled down version of the same information for your clinic newsletter.

Include human interest items from your patient's lives, such as *"Bob and Janet Jones are the proud parents of a strapping 10 pound baby boy born on August 5th"*, or you might include a new recipe from one of your patients in each newsletter. People like to be recognized for their accomplishments.

Depending upon the size of your mailing list, you may spend as much as \$1,000 to print and mail each newsletter. However, this is money well spent. If you generate just one good lifelong patient from each newsletter, it has paid for itself. Suppose you write an article on natural care for premenstrual syndrome. What is the likelihood that at least one of your inactive patients will read that article and realize that they need to return to your office?

While there are other forms of direct mail advertising, who do you think will become a better patient?

- the individual who responds to a Val-Pak coupon for a free exam, or

- the individual who comes in after reading in your clinic newsletter '*Chronic Fatigue Syndrome - A Holistic Approach*'.

Guard Your Professional Reputation

Whether you know it or not, your professional reputation is one of your most cherished possessions, and should be guarded accordingly. Don't do anything that might compromise your reputation. Some areas may seem innocent at first, but without realizing it you can get into trouble. Some examples,

- If you are single, you might be attracted to dating your CA. Not a good idea. If the relationship goes sour, you have lost a good CA, and you may have a very expensive job discrimination lawsuit on your hands that may not be covered by any insurance.
- It is not ethical for doctors to date their patients. While it might turn out OK, a doctor is perceived as having 'deep pockets', and if you break up you may become vulnerable to a lawsuit. If you are sexually attracted to a patient, transfer their care to another chiropractor to remove the temptation from your office. If your state's rules allow, you may be able date that former patient after the required 'cooling off' period has expired, but extreme caution is advisable even then.
- NOOPE: The initials stand for **no out of pocket expenses**. Suppose the patient has a group health policy with a \$100 deductible, and 80% coverage after the deductible is met. The doctor agrees to write off the \$100 and the 20% copayment, thus the patient will not have to pay anything to come in for treatment. Sounds great? Unfortunately in most jurisdictions this is considered fraud against the insurance company, and can land the doctor in Jail.

You are in a public service healing profession. While this gives you wonderful opportunities to help people, it also presents you with 'challenges' you would not face if you were not a doctor. Some choices are gray areas. Is it OK to give a discount to a patient who prepays for a package of 10 adjustments, or to offer free x-rays to a new patient? It may depend upon your state law. Does it convey the professional image most people expect of a doctor? Probably not.

Is it OK to give a discount to a patient who pays cash? For example, if the patient pays cash at the time of service the charge is \$25. However, if the doctor has to bill the insurance company, the charge is \$30. While this sounds very reasonable, it is considered fraud in Texas and most jurisdictions. In a way it is a double standard. If a retail businessman wants to run a sale, or if a tradesman discounts their fee in order to get the job, this is considered fine. However, because you are a health professional, you are held to a higher standard. *If you are in doubt about the legality or ethics of an action you are considering, check with your attorney and state board.*

Dress for Success

You are a professional and should dress and act accordingly. Read John Malloy's book Dress for Success. One guideline is that you should dress as well as your **best** dressed patient. Patients want to go to successful doctors. However, you should refrain from an overly flashy display of wealth, such as expensive jewelry.

While there is room for individual styles of dress, there is no excuse for a doctor having poor hygiene. In practice, you may find it too restricting and warm to wear a clinic jacket while adjusting. However, it makes a good first impression if you wear one during the initial interview, examination, and report of findings.

Yellow Pages Advertising

In smaller communities, yellow page advertising is affordable. However, if you practice in a larger community, this form of advertising can be expensive. You must evaluate if you think it is worth the cost. Many doctors find that an attractive 'in column' advertisement is quite adequate at much less cost. You should ask yourself, *"What type of patient am I trying to attract?"* The type of patient who takes the time to read your credentials in a smaller listing is different than the patient who gravitates to the half page advertisement with lots of pictures.

Professional Listing

There are several acceptable choices when listing your name in the yellow pages or on your business card, such as:

- John Doe, DC
Chiropractor
- Dr. John Doe
Chiropractor
- John Doe, DC
Doctor of Chiropractic
- John Doe, DC, DABCO
Chiropractic Orthopedist

What is **not** appropriate is to put Dr. before your name and DC after your name, such as Dr. John Doe, DC. This gives the appearance of calling yourself Doctor twice. While you may occasionally observe a dentist or MD who makes this mistake, the correct usage has been well known since the time of D.D. Palmer, as evidenced by this quote from page 983 of his book:

"The Chiropractors and Spinologists of a certain school get out their cards with "Dr. U.C. Blank, D.C." It is a sign of egotism to place both Dr. and the letters of your degree to your name. Some think it not good taste to use either, but one is permissible."

Life Long Learning

Successful doctors are continually expanding their knowledge and skills. All chiropractors should have no difficulty handling the commonly seen conditions that present with headaches, neck pain, and mid or low back pain. However, you should strongly consider acquiring additional training in a specialty such as:

- Acupuncture
- Diagnostic Imaging
- Disc Rehabilitation
- Internal Disorders
- Orthopedics
- Pediatrics
- Personal Injury Claims
- Neurology
- Nutrition
- Scoliosis Correction
- Sports Injury

Your goal should be to become the **best** qualified doctor in your specialty in your community. There are multiple advantages to this. First, a patient likes to brag about 'their' doctor. You need to provide them with specific reasons why they should recommend their friends and family to your clinic.

When you attend seminars and gain diplomate or certification status, this gives you additional material for your clinic newsletter, clinic brochures, etc. As you become known as a specialist in

your community, you will attract more and more referrals. Some of these will be from other doctors who recognize your expertise.

Initial Examination and Report of Findings

Until you establish your routine, you might be tempted to try to explain chiropractic during the examination. While you certainly need to explain to your patient what you are doing as you proceed through the examination, don't use this time to explain the results or significance of the tests. That is what the report of findings is for. At the end of the examination, explain to your patient that you have now collected all the information, and you will need time to correlate the history and examination findings with the lab and x-ray results, to generate a report of findings on their condition. Most doctors give this report of findings the next day.

Clinical Pearl: Some doctors advise waiting until after the report of findings before giving any treatment. However, if your patient is in pain, you should strongly consider giving some brief adjustment or therapy that will begin to relieve their pain. Otherwise, you may have an unhappy patient.

Green - Yellow - Red Light

While you are taking the initial history, performing the examination, and giving the report of findings, your patient is giving you non-verbal cues as to their understanding and acceptance of what you are saying. For example:

- Are they paying attention and maintaining eye contact?
- Are they nodding their head in agreement, or do they have a puzzled look on their face?
- Are they sighing or showing signs of impatience?

Based upon your observation of these non-verbal cues, or what the patient says in response to your questions, you can form an opinion as to this individual's willingness to proceed.

- Green light - The patient is in agreement with what you are saying and is ready to proceed.
- Yellow light - The patient appears to have more questions and is uncertain if they should proceed.
- Red light - The patient is openly skeptical about what you are saying and is **not** ready to proceed.

If this patient is in the yellow or red light category, you have probably dropped the ball somewhere. You need to shift gears, perhaps explaining things more slowly to make sure this patient understands the reality of their health condition and their need for care.

Referrals

Here are some simple but often overlooked points:

- If you want referrals, you have to ask for them. You might say, "*Mrs. Jones, you have suffered for years with these headaches until you discovered chiropractic. I am sure you are grateful to the person who first told you about chiropractic. While you can thank that person, the best thanks you can show is to do the same thing for someone else. Do you know anyone who has a health problem that we might be able to help?*"
- Don't ask for referrals until you have 'delivered the goods'. If you start talking about how wonderful chiropractic is, and how the patient should share this wonderful thing with their friends and family, but they are **still in pain**, you are going to appear crass and insensitive.

- Compliment the individual who referred the new patient to your clinic. For example, *"I see you were referred by Mrs. Jones. She is one of our biggest supporters. It is wonderful how she is always trying to help others."* This establishes a common bond between the three of you, and your new patient will probably repeat back to that individual what you said. This also helps to plant the thought with your new patient that referring others to the practice is the thing to do.

Thank You Letters

When you receive a referral from another patient or another doctor, send a short thank you note. It might go something like this:

Dear Mrs. Jones,

I want to thank you for referring Jane Doe to our practice. We take your referral as a measure of trust and confidence in our care, and I want to assure you that we will do our utmost to aid Jane in her health recovery.

As you know, each person responds differently to chiropractic care and she will undoubtedly experience ups and downs on the road to recovery. If you have the opportunity to keep in touch, please encourage her to stick with her treatment schedule.

Please know that I am always available to answer any questions you may have.

Yours in better health,

Your Name, DC

Clinical Pearl: Keep track of how what letters you send out. When you send the same identical letter to the same person, what started out as a sincere expression of gratitude now becomes a canned routine.

Thank You Gifts

You will have some truly phenomenal patients that will refer a large number of patients to you. Find an ethical way to reward these patients. Perhaps write 'no charge' on their route slip the next time they are in for treatment, or you might consider sending them a dozen roses. If you have received several referrals from another doctor during the year, you should send a nice gift basket to that clinic at Christmas time.

Treating Multiple Conditions

At times, a patient may have not recovered from an injury when they experience a new and different injury. Say the patient is being treated for a neck injury incurred in an automobile accident and the bills are going to Insurance Company A. However, you are also treating the patient for low back pain as a result of an on the job injury and the bills are going to Insurance Company B. While the patient may prefer to have both treatments at the same time, you should take care to not mix the two conditions. Insurance companies talk to each other and you may find that one of them is reducing your fees because they say you are not allowed to charge for two office visits on the same day. To avoid this conflict you should consider treating the conditions on separate days. You should also consider keeping the chart notes and billing separate. Otherwise it becomes difficult when you want to copy chart notes, or print a remainder billing for just one claim.

Clinical Pearl: Most doctors will get substantial or complete relief with about 80% of the conditions they treat. Perhaps your new patient presents with a whole 'laundry list' of complaints such as, headaches, neck pain, low back pain, and knee pain. Suppose you decide to treat all four of these conditions at once. Your odds of getting this patient well of all four complaints is now: $0.80 \times 0.80 \times 0.80 \times 0.80 = 41\%$. Instead, ask this patient, *"If I could wave a magic wand and take away just one of these conditions, which would it be?"* Focus on that condition first, then take on the others.

Therapeutic Trial

The majority of patients you see will probably come in with musculoskeletal conditions that you have a great deal of experience treating. However, at other times patients will present with conditions that are new to your clinical experience. In these instances where you are sort of 'flying blind' it is appropriate to present your recommendations as a 'therapeutic trial'. You can suggest a trial course of 10 visits. When you present this option you can truthfully say:

- Ten visits should give enough indication of whether chiropractic treatment will make a difference for this condition, and
- Since chiropractic is perhaps the safest of all possible alternatives, at worst it will have no benefit. However, in all probability, the patient will experience partial or substantial improvement in their condition.

In most cases, the patient appreciates your candor and honesty and willingly proceeds with the proposed treatment.

However, when treating both common and uncommon conditions, it is essential that you get the patient to commit to treatment. You might say to your patient, *"Mrs. Smith, we have a comprehensive treatment plan and are committed to doing everything we can to help you to regain your health. We also need a commitment from you to stick with your treatment program and make your visits on time. If you are just 'trying' chiropractic for a couple of visits, this program is not for you. At the end of 10 visits, we will perform a reexamination and at that time you and I will learn how much if any additional care you may need. Do we have your agreement that you will stick with treatment for the next 10 visits?"*

Treatment Markers

When you are able to quantify a patient's symptoms with numbers do so. In addition to being part of thorough and complete documentation, treatment markers are a practice management tool. Perhaps your patient is halfway through an initial series of ten treatments and comes in saying, *"This treatment is not helping, I'm going to quit coming in."* You can respond, *"I am sorry you are not progressing as well as you expected. However, before you decide to quit care, may I do a brief update on your condition to see if there is something else we might be able to do to help you?"*

With this update, you learn that the intensity of his pain is decreased by one third, and the frequency of his pain is decreased by one half. While this improvement may be less than the patient expected, you have demonstrated that he is in fact getting better, just not as fast as he would like. If you had not taken the time to record these treatment markers, you would lack the proof needed to convince your patient to stick with his treatment program.

Non-compliant Patients

Quite often the patient that complains the loudest that he or she is not getting better is the one who is not following your treatment recommendations. Ask questions to learn if they are following your work restrictions, performing their exercises, taking their supplements, etc. If you discover they are not following your instructions you might say, *"Mr. Jones, we have treated hundreds of patient's with conditions just like yours. The reason you are not getting better is you are not sticking with your program. We can get you through this, but we need your full cooperation."*

Another possibility to consider is the patient may have reinjured the area by some activity they assumed was not important enough to tell you about. When a patient begins to feel better, they are anxious to return to their normal activities. You should very clearly and emphatically instruct your patient, *"Mr. Jones, I know you are feeling much better now, but the structures in your neck are not yet healed. Because most of your pain is gone, you might feel as if you can return to your normal activities. However, your neck ligaments are still in a weakened and very vulnerable state. If you are not careful you can reinjure your neck, perhaps worse than the original injury."*

Office and Furniture Layout

There are a variety of floor plans that have different advantages. The Parker college library has an excellent book by the Parker Chiropractic Research Foundation to give you ideas: 101 select chiropractic clinics and offices; plans--layouts--designs (RA967.P3). Two suggestions:

- Have a separate room with a door that closes for insurance billing. You do not want patients in your reception room eavesdropping on the CA's telephone conversation with a patient or an insurance company.
- In your doctor's consultation room, do not place a massive desk between you and your patients. Instead move your desk up against a wall and place the patient chairs to the side of the desk. You do not want physical or psychological barriers between you and your patients.

Reception Room

You should have a variety of reading material in your reception room, such as Newsweek, Sports Illustrated, Ladies Home Journal, etc. Don't have outdated magazines (older than 6-12 months) in your office. Before you put the magazines out, skim through them yourself. Your patients will regularly ask you questions about any health related article they read.

By necessity, many mothers must bring their children with them when they visit your clinic. If your reception room is large enough, dedicate one corner where children can play. Have some children's books and toys available. You may want to consider a small TV-VCR, so the children can be occupied watching a Disney cartoon, while Mom is being treated.

Have a lending library of health related books your patients can read and check out. One book that will be very popular is the Physician's Desk Reference (PDR). Your patients need to be educated about the side effects of the drugs they are taking.

A fish tank is wonderful addition to your reception room. It is very calming for your patients to watch the fish swim. Hire a professional service to regularly clean your fish tank. If you are not willing to spend the money to keep your fish tank clean, don't put one in.

Clinical Pearl: How large should your reception room be? Patients are often accompanied by friends or family members. For this reason, your reception room needs hold the number of patients you schedule per hour.

Keep on Schedule

If your patient is a professional, such as an engineer or attorney, they may charge more per hour for their time than you do for your time. Most people will not mind a ten minute wait, but if the delay in your office is enough to disrupt their other scheduled activities, you will have an angry patient. Determine the amount of time you need for each visit and arrange your schedule accordingly. If you find yourself continually running behind schedule, you must either change your routine or increase the amount of time you schedule for each visit.

Clinical Pearl: We often use words without thinking about their literal meaning. Consider the following:

- "Please take a seat in our **waiting** room." or
- "Please take a seat in our **reception** room."
- "Mary will **set you up** with an appointment next week." or
- "Mary will **schedule** you for an appointment next week."

Fake It Until You Make It

This is a principle doctors use in order to become successful. How might this manifest? Schedule your patients in a cluster near each other. This will give you more experience staying on time with a busy schedule. While patients don't like to be kept waiting, they also don't like to go to an inexperienced doctor. When they see an empty office, they begin to get concerned, "Why am I the only patient here?"

Fees

The 'correct' amount to charge for your service is very subjective. If you are the most expensive doctor in your community, it will limit who can come to your office. On the other hand, how much confidence would you have in a doctor who is the cheapest in your community? You should talk to other chiropractors to find out what is 'usual and customary' in your community. The Physicians' Fee Reference (<http://www.medfees.com/>) is a book you can purchase that will also provide you with this information.

If you want to encourage 'family' chiropractic care, try to make it affordable for your patients. Perhaps the following fee schedule will work for your practice:

First adult patient	Full fee
Spouse	75% of full fee
Each child	50% of full fee

Clinical Pearl: When there is a financial dispute with a patient, do your utmost to resolve it to the patient's satisfaction. You might ask your patient, "What do you think is fair?" Is it really worth it having an angry patient talking poorly about you in the community, just to collect an additional \$50?

Be Fiscally Responsible

When you are considering a purchase, you should ask yourself three questions:

- Do you want it?
- Do you need it?
- Is it worth it?

The answer to the first question is almost always yes. However, if you cannot also answer yes to the other two, you should reconsider your purchase.

Once you start making money, you will want to reward yourself for all your years of sacrifice, and you will have opportunities to make purchases both in your personal and professional life. Unfortunately, too many doctors purchase extravagantly and incur more debt than they can manage. You should drive a newer model car that meets your needs and shows that you are successful. However, is a \$100,000 Mercedes really worth four times as much as a \$25,000 Toyota Avalon?

Reminder File

Purchase from an office supply store a small file that has folders for 30 days and each of the twelve months. When you receive a bill, determine how many days in advance it must be paid in order for it to arrive on time. Then place the bill in the folder that corresponds to that day. You can also place your self-addressed patient recall postcards into the appropriate folder. Each day pull today's folder and you will have all the postcards that need to go out in the mail, as well as the bills that need to be paid on that day.

Paperwork

For most doctors, paperwork is their least favorite activity. If you can structure a cash only practice where you never have to write narrative reports or correspond with an insurance company, this will make your life much easier. However, if you are going to treat patients who have been in an automobile accident or an on the job injury, it is not **if** you are going to be asked to write a narrative report, but **when** you are going to have to write the report.

Sometimes the insurance company sends you a fill-in the blank form that updates them on the patient's condition. If you are like most doctors who would rather spend their time treating patients, these forms can stack up in your In-box. Insurance companies just love it when a doctor waits two weeks to fill out the form, because this gives them an excuse to keep the money in their bank account for an additional two weeks. Successful doctors do not let paperwork pile up.

Clinical Pearl:

A friend of mine made one simple change that dramatically improved his cash flow. For new patients, instead of waiting until the end of the month billing, he sends out the insurance statement for the initial visit right away. This action decreases by 1-4 weeks the amount of time the insurance company was able to delay paying about \$200. If he sees 25 new patients a month, this is \$5,000 in his bank account now instead of later.

Stretch your 'Comfort Zone'

Successful doctors are always on the lookout for new skills and procedures that will help grow their practice. However, when you adopt a new procedure it should be an addition to your already successful routine. Guard against swinging like a pendulum, abandoning one procedure or technique for a totally new procedure. An example of an additive procedure might be learning acupuncture to have an additional way to help your patient, or having the CA call all patients who have not been in for six months.

Under-Promise and Over-Deliver

Many business people have learned that when bidding a job they should increase by a certain percentage the time and cost of the job estimate. Then when the job is completed sooner and at less cost, the customer is satisfied. Consider the following two scenarios:

- You suggest to patient A that their pain will be decreased by about one-half within one week, or
- You suggest to patient B that their pain will be decreased by about one-half within a few weeks.

After two weeks of care both of these patients are now experiencing one-half of their original pain symptoms. The treatment and clinical outcome for both of these patients was identical. However, which of these two patients will think more highly of you?

Practice Statistics

Occasionally doctors become so focused on practice statistics that their staff becomes uncomfortable under the close scrutiny. If you observe this in your staff, you must adopt a more gentle management style. However, you should track certain monthly statistics in your practice:

- New patients
- Regular patient visits
- Reexaminations
- Average number of visits per active patient
- Total charges
 - You will also want to break this out into categories, such as adjustments, physiotherapy, examinations, x-rays, lab work, nutritional supplements, orthopedic supports, etc.
- Total collections
 - Should be broken out into categories: cash, personal injury, worker's compensation, group health, etc.
- % collections
- Total practice expenses

Practice statistics are how you spot trends in the practice before they become problems. Just as you counsel your patients to practice preventive health care, you must be **proactive** and treat the weaknesses in your practice. You cannot afford to be surprised by a problem that you must **react** to. If you do not understand and apply preventive management techniques in your practice, one might wonder if you are also having difficulty communicating the principles of preventive health care to your patients.

Reward your Staff

A successful practice is a team effort. You should conduct weekly staff meetings where you discuss what is working well and items that need more attention. If you are going to ask your

staff to work harder to meet certain goals, you should be willing to reward that extra effort. Some doctors take the entire staff to attend a Parker Seminar in Las Vegas, while others give cash bonuses. You have to decide what works for your situation. However, it is only human nature that we work harder if we know there is a reward when we finish the task.

Clinical Pearl: Some doctors treat their staff to lunch during the weekly staff meeting. This is a nice perk for your staff and it is a business write-off expense for the practice. However, if you are in a restaurant with customers nearby that can overhear your conversation, you must be careful what you say. If you discuss how a specific patient is responding to care, you must guard against releasing confidential information in a public setting.

Periodically Reevaluate Your Office

It is easy to get stuck in a rut and assume that everything in your practice is just fine. However, the most successful doctors are constantly looking for ways to improve their practice. Here is an exercise you can perform to view your office as it might appear to a new patient. Focus separately on the senses of sight, sound, touch, and smell:

- Sight - This is probably the most important item. Is your office **clean**? There is no excuse for dirt in a doctor's office. If you have a cleaning service that is not up to par, hire a new service. When was the last time your blinds were dusted? Is there dust on the top of your picture frames? Are your picture frames hanging straight? When was the last time your windows were washed? Do your walls need repainting? Are your patient education charts professionally framed, or attached to the wall with thumbtacks? Is your carpet stained or excessively worn? Is the upholstery on your office furniture and adjusting tables in good repair? It is not that expensive to have adjusting tables reupholstered. Do you have clutter stacked on top of filing cabinets or bookcases? Do the occupants of your fish tank look like they are trying to escape from the Black Lagoon?
- Sound - If you use drop table technique, with your eyes closed **listen** to the noise these tables make from outside the treatment room. I have observed new patients in the reception room startle when they first hear this noise. You may want to consider adding sound insulation to the walls of treatment rooms for this reason. Interior walls are not usually insulated and if you can hear the conversation in an adjacent treatment room, this is not good.
- Touch - Believe it or not, some chiropractors have office furniture which is very ergonomically **uncomfortable**. What temperature do you set your office thermostat? If a new patient is in a gown, 65 degrees may be too cold for them.
- Smell - If there are bad smells in your office, fix it **quick**.

Clinical Pearl: You should negotiate for a clause in your lease which restricts what tenants can be located adjacent to your clinic. If you have a dry cleaner or hair salon next to your clinic, it is very difficult to keep their chemical smells out of your office.

Learn From the Dental Profession

If you want pointers on how to more effectively manage a preventive oriented practice, look to the dental profession. Here are some techniques they use:

- Remind the patient by telephone the day before their appointment. Most patients appreciate this convenience, and it will decrease the likelihood of having a 'no show' patient.
- Reschedule all missed appointments. Don't let patients 'fall through the cracks'.
- Send postcards that remind the patient it is time for their checkup.
- Schedule long term appointments, sometimes one year in advance.

Clinical Pearl: Have the patient their address on the reminder postcard that will be mailed to them. If you were to receive a piece of mail from yourself, this would get your attention, right? This is what happens when the patient sees their own handwriting on the postcard.

Strive for Life Long Patients

Some doctors are so successful that they have a waiting list of patients who want to come to them. How do they accomplish this? They take care of their base. Any businessman will tell you it costs much more time and money to generate a new client than to keep an existing one. The financial security of your practice can be visualized as a bucket full of water. If there are many small holes in the bottom of the bucket, we must continually pour in more water if the bucket is to remain full. If you keep your existing patients happy, they will stay with you, refer others, and you will not have to continually have to pour more water into a leaky bucket.

Clinical Pearl: In Louisiana, Cajuns use the word Lagniappe which means "*a little something extra*", similar to a 'baker's dozen'. You should always be on the lookout for a little something extra you can do for your patients. This is what cements them to you as a lifelong patient.

Record non-clinical information

Unless you have a phenomenal memory, it is hard to remember everything a patient tells you. If the information is clinically relevant, it belongs in the patient chart notes. However, what if this information is not clinically relevant, such as the names and ages of their children? Find an inconspicuous place to record this information, such as the back of the patient introduction sheet. Before you step into the treatment room, you can briefly refamiliarize yourself with this information. Then when you enter the room, ask a question relevant to their home life such as, "*So, did Tommy make the track team?*"

Patient Satisfaction Survey

Have you ever received a survey from a hospital asking you to rate your satisfaction with their service? You also should attempt to learn from your patients what they like and don't like about your office. While it is not the purpose of the survey, it does have advertising value in that this is another opportunity to keep your name in front of the patient.

Find out the special needs of local employers

Employers may have specific job requirements that you can assist them with. For example, truck drivers need periodic DOT physical examinations. You are very capable of performing these examinations, which consist of vital signs, a routine EENT examination, listening to the heart and lungs, etc.

A DC in eastern Oregon became a certified collection site for drug testing. While this is not difficult, the protocol is quite specific if the test is to be considered valid. Does he make a lot of money performing this service? No, but the employees who are not his patients get to see his clean office and visit with his friendly staff. When they have a chiropractic problem, who will they think of?

Use the Internet

Are you aware that most Internet service providers give you a free personal web site with your membership? It is not difficult to create a simple web page. You can list your services and have pictures of your office and staff. Write a few sentences detailing your approach to health restoration and your areas of expertise. Where else can you get worldwide advertising for FREE? Also in today's Internet generation, you should consider putting your email address on your business card. For an example of a very professional chiropractic website view:

<http://www.ahschironeuro.com>

Map on back of business card

If your office is not easy to find, put a simple map with directions to your office on the back of your business card.

Clinical Pearl: At the end of your new patient encounter, take out one of your business cards and write your home phone number on the card. As you hand it to your patient say, *"This is my home phone number. I am here to take care of you and your friends and family. If you have an emergency and need my help, please call me."* With this action your patient **knows** you care about their health. It is unlikely that your patient will abuse this privilege by calling you at home with a trivial question.

Birthday Cards

Birthday cards are a thoughtful touch that your patients will appreciate. For some of your patients, this is the only birthday card they will receive. You have the opportunity to become the high point in that person's day.

End of Day Telephone Calls

Have your receptionist write down the name and telephone number of each new patient, or any patient who was in a great deal of pain that day. At the end of the day or when you get home, call each of these patients. These calls are usually short, less than 5 minutes long. However, your patient will really appreciate your concern for their health. This is 'something extra' that successful caring doctors routinely do.

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